Dr. F. W. Barry's Report to the Local Government Board on the General Sanitary Condition of the Seghill Urban District.

George Buchanan,
Medical Department,
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Area 1,425 acres; rateable value 8,038*l.*
Population (1871) 1,980, (1881) 2,131; inhabited houses (1881) 406.
Persons per house 5·24; persons per acre 1·5.

I.—*Description.*—The Urban Sanitary District of Seghill is co-terminous with the township of the same name, in the Earsdon registration sub-district, and is situated a little to the north-west of the centre of the Tynemouth Union. It is surrounded on all sides, but the north-west (to which lies the Cramlington Urban District), by the Tynemouth Rural District. The district contains but one village, that of Seghill, which may be said to be solely inhabited by the miners employed at the colliery.

II.—*Streets and Dwelling-houses.*—The houses are chiefly arranged in the usual long rows, common to colliery villages, but in one or two instances there are small squares, as, for example, at the Old Fold, to which there is only one narrow means of access, the houses all looking towards a large ashpit, which occupies the entire centre of the square. The dwellings themselves consist of colliery cottages of the old type, many of which are mere hovels. They contain two rooms, as a rule; but in some instances only one, on the ground floor, with an unceiled loft above, which is reached through a trap door by means of a ladder. The rooms themselves are small, low, ill-ventilated, and badly lighted. The floors of the lower rooms are frequently below the level of the ground, which is both unpaved and undrained, and the dampness which arises from this mode of construction is aggravated by the want of eave spouts. Some old cottages, at present fortunately unoccupied, are roofed with thatch. Many of the houses are unfurnished with means of through ventilation, and it is stated that in consequence of the wretched condition of some of the lofts, the inmates are all driven to sleep downstairs, and this leads, in addition to other evils, to overcrowding. The Medical Officer of Health has already reported to the Authority the houses at Seghill Moor House, which are quite unfit for habitation.

The streets throughout this district have a generally neglected appearance, and some of them contain, heaped up at the sides, all the refuse and filth from the houses abutting upon them. None of the footways are paved, nor are the roads properly channelled.

III.—*Water Supply.*—The water supply is in all cases obtained from wells sunk into the freestone (upon an outcrop of which the village is built), and vary in depth from 10 to 31 feet. The public wells are four in number, and the water obtained from them is stated to be of good quality, and, with the exception of the well at Quarry Row, they appear to be fairly protected from chances of pollution. The amount of labour entailed in fetching and carrying is in some cases very great, the wells being, at a considerable distance from many of the houses. During last year they were cleaned, repaired, covered over, and furnished with pumps by the Sanitary Authority.

IV.—*Sewerage and Drainage.*—There cannot be said to be any proper system of sewerage in this district. Lengths of glazed sanitary pipes have been put down to some of the rows during the last year or two to carry the slops and liquid refuse, and for this purpose trapped gullies have been put in at intervals, but the greater part of the village is very imperfectly drained. The older drains, which were originally put down for highway purposes, are constructed of stone and covered with flags. They are furnished with untrapped catch pits at irregular intervals, down which slops and liquid refuse are thrown. The openings into these drains are insufficient in number, and are in some cases out of repair. During the last year or two considerable efforts have been made to keep these drains clear by frequent flushings. The sewage in all instances eventually finds its way into one or other of the burns.

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V.—*Excrement and Refuse disposal.*—The houses in Seghill may be said to be unfurnished with any means of excrement disposal, if we except a few shanties, composed of old packing cases and the like, which have been put up in the gardens by the miners themselves. In consequence of this general absence of accommodation, the male portion of the population resort to the fields, whilst chamber utensils are used by the women and children, the contents of which are either emptied along with the slops and general house refuse into the ashpits, or thrown on to the roadside. Large uncovered ashpits are dotted about at intervals throughout the village. The average dimensions of these are 20 feet × 9 feet × 4 feet. This gives a capacity of 720 cubic feet, so that the ashpits, when full, are capable of containing 80 cartloads of 9 cubic feet each. Taking the average rainfall at 27 inches per annum, these ashpits would receive over 2,500 gallons of water per annum from that source alone. The largest I measured was 39 feet long, 8 feet 4 inches wide, and 4 feet deep. Several rows are unfurnished even with this means for the disposal of their refuse, as, for instance, at Quarry, Whitehead Buildings, Barrow Row, and Lake Terrace, where the ashes and filth are heaped up at the side of the road. From what I have already stated as to the want of means for excrement disposal, the condition of the roadsides in the above localities may be better imagined than described.

The scavenging is carried out by the farmers in the neighbourhood. The ashpits are said to be emptied, and the filth removed from places where these receptacles do not exist, at monthly intervals but I understand that the usual difficulties which accompany this form of removal are experienced in Seghill, as frequently at the time when scavenging is most necessary the farmers do not find it convenient to attend to it.

VI.—*Keeping of Animals.*—In former times pig-keeping was more or less general among the miners, but at the present time, few, if any, pigs are kept in this district. Fowls, rabbits, and pigeons are, however, kept in large numbers, and the keeping places for these are frequently placed against the houses, and are then a source of nuisance.

VII.—*Means for the isolation of Infectious Diseases.*—Until the present year there were no means provided for the isolation of persons suffering from infectious diseases, but in consequence of the occurrence of some cases of small-pox at the beginning of this year a detached house was set apart as a temporary hospital. This house which had formerly been let in tenements, was put into a thorough state of repair, cleansed, and whitewashed, and three wards were fitted up with two beds in each. A privy and ashpit were also built. The house, although not unsuitable for the emergency for which it was provided, can only be regarded as a makeshift, as it does not possess the necessary qualifications for a hospital. The cubic space per bed in the wards is 670, 840, and 960 feet respectively. After this building was provided the small-pox died out, and no use was therefore made of it, nor has it ever been put into requisition. No means have ever been provided for the efficient disinfection of clothing, bedding, &c., nor is there a mortuary.

VIII.—*Slaughter-houses, &c.*—There is only one slaughter-house in the district, and this is neither registered nor licensed.

There are no common lodging-houses.

IX.—*General Sanitary Administration.*—The Local Government Act was adopted in Seghill in 1863. From the brief summary I have given of the sanitary circumstances of this district it will be seen that up to a very recent period the sanitary administration has been exceptionally lax, and such as demands the gravest reprehension. It is, however, a fact of common notoriety in the district that the formation of a local board for Seghill was promoted by the late proprietor of the colliery in order to keep the administration entirely in his own hands, and especially to prevent expenditure on what he considered superfluous sanitary improvements. It is scarcely necessary to add that the Sanitary Authority have contracted no loans nor drawn up any code of byelaws. Recently, since the decease of the Chairman, some efforts have been made to patch up, and in some cases to improve, some of the most glaring evils which existed, *e.g.*, the measures taken for protecting the water supply, the laying of certain lengths of drain, and the provision of a temporary hospital, &c., but there can be no question that it will take a considerable amount of earnest work before the district can be regarded to be in satisfactory sanitary condition.

The present *Medical Officer of Health* was appointed in October 1881, and receives a salary of 15*l.* per annum, half of which is repaid out of the moneys voted by Parliament. This officer holds a similar appointment under the neighbouring Urban

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Sanitary Authority of Cramlington. He has apparently acquired, since his appointment, a thorough knowledge of the sanitary circumstances of his district, and seems to have given the Authority sound advice with regard to its requirements. He receives a regular monthly return of the deaths occurring in the district from the registrar, and this is supplemented by an immediate return on the occurrence of a death from infectious disease. The action of the Medical Officer of Health with regard to infectious disease has hitherto been limited to the giving of advice and the distribution of "disinfectants." The gentleman who formerly held the appointment of Medical Officer received only the nominal salary of 5*l.* per annum, and, as might be expected, his reports were of the most unsatisfactory and meagre description.

The *Inspector of Nuisances*, who is also surveyor and collector, receives a salary of 10*l.* for his services in the former capacity, and a further sum of 10*l.* as surveyor and collector. It is only due to this officer to say that such improvements as have been effected have been carried out under his supervision.

Mortality Statistics and Prevalence of Disease.—In the following table the mortality statistics for the Urban Sanitary District of Seghill for the ten years, 1873–1882, will be found, and the results are such as might reasonably have been anticipated, from a consideration of the circumstances detailed in this report.

MORTALITY STATISTICS for the URBAN SANITARY DISTRICT of SEGHILL, for the 10 Years, 1873–1882.

Year.	Estimated Population.	Total Deaths from all causes registered in the District.	Total Deaths corrected for Workhouse.	Corrected Death Rate per 1,000 living.	Deaths from: Small-pox.	Measles.	Scarlatina.	Diphtheria.	Whooping Cough.	Fever.	Diarrhœa, Dysentery, &c.	Death Rate from Diseases in Columns 5–11 per 1,000 living.	Births.	Deaths under 1 Year of Age.	Deaths under 1 Year of Age per 1,000 Births.
Columns	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.
1873 -	2,008	55	57	28·4	—	—	—	—	—	4	1	2·5	120	19	158
1874 -	2,023	57	57	28·2	—	—	3	—	—	—	—	1·5	109	26	239
1875 -	2,038	71	72	35·3	—	—	1	—	4	—	—	2·4	108	31	287
1876 -	2,053	61	62	30·2	—	—	—	—	—	2	5	3·4	114	26	228
1877 -	2,068	58	58	28·0	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	·5	96	15	156
1878 -	2,084	56	57	27·3	—	5	7	—	—	—	1	6·2	99	28	283
1879 -	2,099	66	68	32·4	—	—	19	—	1	—	—	9·5	87	14	161
1880 -	2,115	37	37	17·5	—	—	1	—	—	—	2	1·4	80	9	113
1881 -	2,131	48	48	22·5	—	—	—	—	—	—	4	1·9	92	20	218
1882 -	2,146	38	39	18·2	—	—	—	2	1	—	1	1·9	89	14	157
Mean for 10 years, 1873–1882	**2,076**	**54**	**55**	**26·6**	—	**2·89**	**14·93**	**0·96**	**2·89**	**2·89**	**6·74**	**3·1**	**99**	**20**	**200**
Mean of 10 years, 1873–1882: Earsdon Registration Sub-district -				22·8	—	3·73	11·46	0·42	4·83	3·39	9·41	3·3	—	—	157
Mean of 10 years, 1873–1882: Tynemouth Registration District -				22·0	0·05	2·48	13·25	0·72	4·77	4·42	10·16	3·6	—	—	155
Mean of 10 years, 1873–1882: England and Wales -				20·8	0·79	3·76	6·94	1·27	5·03	4·22	8·45	3·0	—	—	145

Rates per 10,000 of the population per annum.

From the above table it will be seen that the general death-rate from all causes has been alarmingly high, the mean for the 10 years being 26·6 per 1,000 of the population, and even this high rate was exceeded in seven out of the 10 years under consideration, and it is only in the last three years, during part of which some attempts have been made to ameliorate the wretched condition of things, that any reduction has been shown.

Enteric fever has fortunately not been prevalent to a marked extent, but scarlatina was fatally prevalent in 1878 and 1879, in the latter year no less than 19 deaths being registered from this cause alone in a population of 3,000 persons. The mean death-rate for the decennial period from scarlatina (14·93 per 1,000), although little above

that (13·25) which obtained throughout the Tynemouth Union, was more than double that of England and Wales (6·94) for the same period. In a district in which the dwelling accommodation is of the character found in Seghill, it is useless to expect the ravages of this disease to be checked, unless efficient means are provided to secure the isolation of infected persons, and the disinfection of infected clothing, bedding, &c.

The infant mortality, which is one of the most sensitive tests of the sanitary circumstances of a district, is such as to call for the gravest consideration. During the 10 years under review the death-rate amongst children under one year of age was as high as 200 per 1,000 births registered, or, in other words, one out of every five children born in Seghill has failed to complete the first year of its existence. The rate of infant mortality is higher in Seghill than in any other of the 11 sanitary districts comprised within the Tynemouth Union.

FRED. W. BARRY.

June 1883.

RECOMMENDATIONS.

(1.) It is important, with a view to preventing the spread of infectious disease in their district, that the Sanitary Authority should have in readiness (*a*) some permanent means for the isolation of persons found to be suffering from infectious diseases and who cannot in their own homes be properly lodged and accommodated; (*b*) some apparatus for the efficient disinfection of infected bedding, clothing, &c.; and (*c*) a proper mortuary. These provisions can probably best be made in conjunction with one or more of the neighbouring sanitary districts.

(2.) No unnecessary delay should be allowed to take place in the provision of proper privies for the many dwellings which are destitute of accommodation of this sort. When practicable the privy should be placed in a yard or garden at some little distance from the dwelling. In other cases where, from aggregation of dwellings or other adequate reasons, this plan cannot be adopted, groups of privies might be erected on land detached from (though within reasonable distance of) the dwellings to be served. In view of the large amount of ashes which have to be got rid of in a colliery district such as Seghill, some form of pail closet, in which the excreta are collected apart from the bulk of the dry refuse, will probably be found the most suitable.

Properly constructed ashpits should be built for all houses not so supplied. Further information on this subject may be obtained from the office report upon "certain "means of preventing excrement nuisances in towns and villages." Whatever system is adopted it will be essential to its proper management that the Sanitary Authority should undertake the removal of the refuse.

(3.) The Sanitary Authority should take steps to provide their district with efficient means of sewerage and drainage. This will necessarily include the thorough ventilation of public and private drains, and the proper disposal of the sewage at the outfall. In this matter they will do well to take the advice of a competent engineer.

(4.) In all cases where nuisance arises from the ill-paved and uneven condition of back streets and common court yards, the Sanitary Authority should take steps to cause such streets or yards to be properly levelled, channelled, and repaired or paved.

(5.) All houses, which from faulty construction, want of ventilation, or dis-repair, are in such a state as to be a nuisance, or injurious to health, should be closed until they are rendered fit for habitation. Such as cannot be rendered fit for habitation should not be suffered to be occupied. The provision of eave spouts should be enforced to all houses in, adjoining, or near to any street.

(6.) With a view to the more efficient sanitary administration of the district, a code of byelaws should be drawn up with respect to such matters, as the Authority are empowered by the Public Health Act to regulate, especially

(*a.*) For the prevention of nuisances arising from snow, filth, ashes, &c.

(*b.*) For the prevention of the keeping of animals in any premises so as to be a nuisance or injurious to health.

(*c.*) With respect to new streets and buildings.

(*d.*) For the registration and regulation of slaughter-houses.

In drawing up these byelaws the Authority should consult the model byelaws issued by the Local Government Board.